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ABSTRACT

This report examines the management of three areas related to the preparation of volunteers for Peace Corps service: staging, pre-service training, and attrition. The introduction summarizes the activities undertaken by the review. Chapter 2 focuses on staging, which is variously intended to provide country orientation, information about Peace Corps service, selection of individuals for service, some preliminary training, and medical and administrative processing. It describes the three staging processes in use that differ in format, objectives, and cost. It is found that all do not meet their intended purpose, and no formal criteria exist for determining which format volunteers will undergo. Chapter 3 considers the highly decentralized volunteer training system that has evolved. Findings indicate that (1) in-country staffs are autonomous decision makers on matters concerning form and content of training programs; (2) their ability to design, conduct, and manage this function varies significantly among countries; (3) volunteers do not receive the type, quality, and degree of cross-cultural, language, and technical training they need to be effective; and (4) a core curriculum is under development. Chapter 4 concerns management of attrition. It is reported that attrition data are regularly collected, but there is no routine analysis or distribution of the data. (YLB)

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BY THE U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Report To The Director, Peace Corps

The Preparation Of Volunteers For Peace Corps Service: Some Areas Need Management Attention

The Peace Corps marks its 20th birthday in 1981. Its successes during this period have been dependent to a large degree on its volunteers and their preparation. This dependence will continue in the future.

This report examines the management of three areas related to the preparation of volunteers for Peace Corps service: staging, pre-service training, and attrition.

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INTERNATIONAL DIVISION

B-203243

Mrs. Loret Miller Ruppe
Director, Peace Corps

Dear Mrs. Ruppe:

This is our report on "The Preparation of Volunteers for Peace Corps Service: Some Areas Need Management Attention."

This report contains recommendations to you on pages 13, 30, and 36. As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and to the cognizant congressional appropriation and authorization committees.

Sincerely,

Frank C. Conahan

Frank C. Conahan
Director

GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE REPORT TO THE DIRECTOR, PEACE CORPS

THE PREPARATION OF VOLUNTEERS FOR PEACE CORPS SERVICE: SOME AREAS NEED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION

D I G E S T

The Peace Corps marks its 20th birthday in 1981. Throughout its 20-year existence, the Peace Corps has provided more than 80,000 volunteers to assist the people of many countries in meeting their need for trained personnel. Although subject to some variations, the basic volunteer cycle--recruitment, staging, training, and service--has existed since the Peace Corps was founded.

In light of the crucial importance of the volunteers to the Peace Corps, this report examines the management of three areas related to the preparation of volunteers for Peace Corps service: staging, preservice training, and attrition. (See ch. 1.)

STAGING

A Peace Corps staging, which all prospective volunteers attend, is variously intended to provide country orientation, information about Peace Corps service, selection of individuals for service, some preliminary training, and medical and administrative processing. The three staging processes currently in use differ in format, objectives, and cost. All do not meet the intended purposes of a staging and no formal criteria exists for determining which staging process a group of volunteers will undergo.

Many individuals are sent to their assignment countries without having been objectively assessed before their departures on their suitability and adaptability for the Peace Corps experience. Further, the level of preliminary training and orientation provided under the three phases varies so much that some individuals are probably less prepared for service than others. (See ch. 2.)

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

A highly decentralized training system has evolved within the agency. Under the existing system, in-country staffs have become, to a large degree, autonomous decisionmakers regarding the form and content of training programs. They are operating for the most part with very little guidance, direction, or input from Peace Corps headquarters on what should be provided in pre-service training and how it should be provided. The ability of country staffs to design, conduct, and manage this very important function varies significantly from country to country.

In some countries, key elements of training (such as objective setting, design, staffing, implementation, and evaluation) were being handled creatively and effectively. In other countries, GAO found: specific learning goals and objectives were not always established; exchange of training program information between countries was rare; little or no information on trainees was provided by Washington prior to their arrival; specific volunteer assignments had not been identified before training began; some instructors had little or no experience as trainers; excessive training personnel compared to trainees was leading to increased costs; and lack of consistent feedback and objective evaluations. These deficiencies lead us to conclude that in the Peace Corps today, potential volunteers are not assured of receiving the type, quality, and degree of cross-cultural, language, and technical training they need to be as effective as possible in their assigned jobs and to derive satisfaction from their service.

A core curriculum which sets forth both the elements and goals of pre-service training as well as standards and guidelines on what this training should provide to all potential volunteers is under development but is still 2 years away from being put into practice. (See ch. 3.)

ATTRITION DATA

The Office of Special Services is collecting data on attrition on a continuing basis. No analysis or distribution of this data is taking place on a routine basis.

If this data were analyzed and disseminated more regularly to appropriate segments of Peace Corps management, a more efficient, concerted, and directed attack could be waged on unwanted attrition. (See ch. 4.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

GAO recommends that the Director, Peace Corps,

--ensure that every staging process (1) provides an objective assessment by qualified staff concerning the suitability and adaptability of prospective volunteers for Peace Corps service and (2) imparts the skills needed to make a successful transition to living and working effectively in a different culture;

--establish a single, uniform staging format which contains the important points mentioned above at a cost that makes it feasible for all prospective volunteers to attend;

--provide for more centralized guidance of pre-service training;

--accelerate the development of the core curriculum and include guidance on how the core curriculum should be implemented; and

--establish a system to collect and evaluate relevant attrition data, regularly distribute the results to management, and make changes to minimize the adverse effects of attrition. (See pp. 13, 30, and 36.)

AGENCY COMMENTS

A draft of this report was submitted to the Peace Corps for review and comment. The official comments of the Peace Corps appear in their entirety as Appendix I to this report. Agency comments are also included at the end of each chapter. Overall, the Peace Corps concurred with our recommendations.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAST	center for assessment and training
COMP	comprehensive staging
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
GAO	U.S. General Accounting Office
PRIST	pre-invitational staging
O/PPE	Office of Program Planning and Evaluations
OPTC	Office of Programming and Training Coordination
O/SS	Office of Special Services
RTRO	regional training resource office

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Peace Corps marks its 20th birthday in 1981. Throughout its 20-year existence it has provided more than 80,000 volunteers to interested countries throughout the world to help the people of those countries meet their needs for trained manpower.

The Peace Corps today is represented in approximately 62 countries throughout the world: 24 in its Africa region; 21 in its Latin America and Caribbean region; and 17 in its North Africa, Near East, Asia and Pacific region. About 5,700 volunteers who work in these countries are involved in varied projects: some 40 percent work in projects related to education; another 15 percent work in food production; another 15 percent work in health and nutrition; and some 6 percent work in energy, conservation, water, and sanitation. A partial list of the types of current assignments follows:

- agricultural development
- animal traction
- aquaculture development
- cooperative development
- dam building
- food production
- forestry
- grain storage
- health education
- inland fisheries
- irrigation development
- livestock production
- maternal/child care
- primary education
- rural development
- rural feeder roads construction
- rural public health
- rural sanitation
- school construction
- secondary education
- skilled trades training
- small business
- small farmer income generation
- special education
- vocational training
- youth development

Extreme diversity exists among the locations, conditions, climates, cultures, languages, and assignments. There are few similarities, for example, between one volunteer helping develop a village sanitation education program in El Salvador and another volunteer assisting farmers with rice and vegetable production along the Senegal River in Mauritania. Despite these diversities, a common element does exist: the need for the appropriate cross-cultural, technical, and language skills to perform assignments.

An individual normally becomes a Peace Corps volunteer by first being recruited for an available position on a particular project in a specific country. Those individuals found initially qualified are invited to attend a phase in the United States known as staging which can last as long as 8 days. During staging, these individuals learn more about the Peace Corps and the

Peace Corps learns more about them. If there is still mutual interest at the conclusion of the staging, individuals are invited to a pre-service training period. This training period is normally held in the country of the assignment; concentrates on developing language, cross-cultural, and technical skills; and lasts from 2 to 4 months. When the training period ends, and if the individuals are still interested and the Peace Corps finds them to be qualified, they begin a 2-year term of service as volunteers. The basic volunteer cycle--recruitment, staging, pre-service training, service--has existed throughout the Peace Corps' 20-year history.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Because of the crucial importance of the volunteer to the Peace Corps and also in conjunction with the findings contained in our most recently issued report on the Peace Corps, 1/ we reviewed three major aspects of Peace Corps management: staging, pre-service training, and attrition data.

Staging

We considered the staging phase to be very important in the cycle for developing a cadre of effective volunteers with realistic goals and expectations. Because of the existence of three different formats, we attended sessions of each type which were held in the summer of 1980 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; St. Louis, Missouri; and in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Our interest was in finding out the rationale for the existence of three formats to apparently achieve the same objectives. We also documented how each format went about achieving these objectives.

Pre-service training

In light of the expressed importance of pre-service training in achieving the agency's mission, we reviewed how well this training was being designed, conducted, and managed. In May and June of 1980, we visited Zaire, Togo, Thailand, the Philippines, Guatemala, and Paraguay for approximately 3 weeks each.

The objective of our work in these countries centered on the following key elements of pre-service training:

--how well those responsible for pre-service training had specifically expressed, in writing, what they wanted the training to accomplish;

1/"Changes Needed for a Better Peace Corps," (ID-78-26, Feb. 6, 1979.)

--the degree, quality of effort, and the amount of time invested in planning and designing a program which responded to the stated objectives;

--the extent to which competent and qualified individuals were used in the design and implementation of the training program;

--how responsive the actual program was to the stated objectives and to the training plan and whether it was arranged in a cost-conscious manner; and

--the role and use of monitoring and evaluation instruments in the training program

In addition to our review, A.L. Nellum and Associates--a program and management consulting firm--conducted a similar study on six countries in the North Africa, Near East, Asia and Pacific region from September through December 1979. Their report was issued in January of 1980 and it covered these countries: Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Fiji, Tonga, and Western Samoa.

Before our overseas work began, research and inquiries at Peace Corps headquarters disclosed that little, if any, criteria or guidance was available or being provided to the overseas locations on the design, conduct, and management of pre-service training although responsibility for providing this activity rested with the staff in-country. There were no agency criteria and guidance against which actual overseas operations could be examined. To maintain a consistent approach and to arrive at conclusions applicable to the overall pre-service training function--not just to an individual country's pre-service training program--we used criteria based, in our view, on generally accepted, sound management practices.

The criteria we used emphasized a systematic, comprehensive approach to developing and conducting a training program. That is, one which involved carrying out steps, beginning with analyzing needs and establishing goals and concluding with evaluating the extent to which specified objectives were met. A more specific description of the key elements which formed the focus of our review of pre-service training follows.

Objective setting

What skills, knowledge, or characteristics did the agency expect trainees to receive as a result of the training? This would, of necessity, involve setting down fairly specific goals and objectives of a measurable nature to have real meaning in the training system. Otherwise, it would be extremely difficult to design a specific training program that would be responsive

to general objectives and nearly impossible to ever determine whether the objectives were achieved.

Planning and design

Essential elements would be for the planners to have advance knowledge about trainees and their eventual assignments. The planning and designing stage must also produce a clear training plan.

Staff

We recognized that it is beneficial if individuals who have had prior volunteer experience design and/or conduct the pre-service training program. However, of equal or greater importance was an individual's qualifications or experience as a trainer or designer. The ability of individuals to transform knowledge into training plans and to effectively carry out training plans were considered quite crucial. We also recognized that, to some degree, training could be provided to overcome deficiencies caused by insufficient qualifications or experience.

Implementation

Researching and marshalling the resources needed to accomplish the required tasks can get quite complicated at times. Therefore, this element requires a high degree of attention to ensure that not only are all necessary aspects being covered, but that they are being covered well and for a reasonable cost. Without such attention, even the most well-thought-out objectives and well-designed training plans can either fall short during implementation or can cost more than they should.

Monitoring and evaluation

We considered tracking the progress of the program and of individuals as extremely important items which needed monitoring while programs were current. Additionally, an after-the-fact objective assessment of the degree to which the stated goals were achieved and the manner in which they were achieved is necessary if encountered problems are to be identified, made part of the institutional memory, and either avoided or addressed more effectively by management.

Attrition data

In light of the rather high attrition rates being experienced within the Peace Corps and the existence of a central point where information concerning early terminees was being directed, we looked into the work of the Office of Special Services to determine (1) what type of data was being accumulated, analyzed, and distributed on early terminations and

General

Our work at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., supplemented the work undertaken at other locations. We reviewed pertinent records and held discussions with Peace Corps country directors and staff; with trainees and volunteers in the field; and with various headquarters officials, contractors, and consultants.

CHAPTER 2

MANAGEMENT OF STAGINGS

All potential volunteers go through a process known as a staging. The process takes place in this country after an individual has been recruited and prior to the start of pre-service training in-country. Three staging formats are currently being used:

Staging Format	Description
COMP	a 2-1/2 to 3-day comprehensive staging
PRIST	a 6-day pre-invitational staging
CAST	an 8-day center for assessment and training

We found that the three staging formats differ substantially in form, cost, and objectives although the overall intent is similar. No formal criteria exists for determining or deciding which of the three stagings a prospective group of volunteers will attend. The type of staging a potential volunteer will attend depends largely on the request of the country director. This request, of course, is dependent upon funding availability, according to Peace Corps officials. In addition, the level of preliminary training and orientation provided under each staging varies so much that some individuals are less prepared for their in-country training and eventual service than others and many are not objectively assessed on their adaptability for the Peace Corps experience.

THE REASONS FOR STAGINGS

The Peace Corps recruits approximately 3,500 individuals each year to serve overseas as volunteers. Stagings are intended to give individuals an opportunity to learn more about the Peace Corps. It is also a time during which individuals are asked to strongly consider the demands of Peace Corps service and to decide whether or not they believe they can commit 2 years to being Peace Corps volunteers. Stagings are also intended to be a time during which the Peace Corps attempts to gauge the individual's motivation and to assess characteristics and other qualities which experience has shown make for successful volunteer service. Contacts between the individual and Peace Corps representatives before staging tend to be more directed toward determining whether individuals are qualified for the jobs in which they have expressed an interest. Routine medical and administrative details are also attended to at stagings.

Although by no means entirely definitive, stagings can enable the Peace Corps to make a limited, but objective, determination on an individual's adaptability for the rigors to be encountered in service. To some degree, stagings introduce

a measure of quality control into the selection of individuals who best represent the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps can then more effectively address its objectives of (1) helping promote a better understanding of the American people and (2) providing individuals to help countries meet their need for trained personnel. Stagings can also help manage unwanted attrition (those early terminations which needlessly erode scarce agency time and resources.) By identifying and not selecting those individuals found to be unsuitable for the Peace Corps experience before they go overseas, scarce funds for travel, training, and support would be conserved. Valuable staff time would also be saved.

Stagings can serve as a realistic vehicle for conveying what is to be expected from the Peace Corps volunteer experience--short of actually being in-country. They can also serve as an important step in gaining skills needed to successfully make the transition to living and working in different cultures and to lessen the potentially damaging effects of lows when they are encountered.

Armed with this information and preliminary training, individuals can better assess their own suitability, adaptability, and desire for the Peace Corps experience and can more realistically decide whether or not to enter service. If they decide to enter the Peace Corps by proceeding to the country of assignment, the information and training gained at the stagings can lessen the anxieties associated with this transition.

THE STAGING FORMATS

According to Peace Corps officials, approximately 3,082 individuals attended the three staging formats in fiscal year 1980. Of these, 897 attended CAST, 340 attended PRIST, and 1,845 attended COMP.

Comprehensive staging

COMP focuses on country orientation and final administrative and medical processing. In some cases where special needs exist to provide more information about country political, social, or racial issues, it may be extended 1 or 2 days. The session is held immediately before the volunteers depart overseas for pre-service training; cost is approximately $273 per person.

The Peace Corps staff generally includes a staging coordinator, country representative, Peace Corps nurse, and one former Peace Corps volunteer for each group of 12 to 15. The number of trainees varies at each session. At the session we visited, 106 were present--a staff-to-trainee ratio of 1 to 8.

Before the trainees arrive, the entire staff meets at the site for a 1 and 1/2-day planning session and to finalize the agenda. COMP goals are to

--provide country, cultural, and project information to trainees;

--generally relate the cross-cultural aspects of volunteer service;

--build group rapport; and

--complete final administrative and medical processing.

These goals are achieved mainly through staff presentations, films, and group discussions.

Other than an exercise in cross-cultural skills, which is administered only during an extended COMP, training normally does not take place. Although stagings are intended to be vehicles to gauge motivation and assess suitability, we found that selection is not a primary objective and individuals who attend it are not routinely assessed for Peace Corps service. However, decisions not to accept individuals are possible if trainees exhibit clearly unsuitable behavior for Peace Corps service. In addition, the trainees can, in effect, not select themselves. At the staging we attended, three trainees were not selected; two chose not to go on their own; and one was not selected by the staff.

Pre-invitational staging

PRIST focuses on mutual assessment and country orientation. It particularly emphasizes self-assessment, although the staff does assess a trainee's suitability for Peace Corps service to some degree. The staging is held about 3 to 4 weeks before the start of pre-service training; cost is approximately $833 per person. PRIST goals are to

--select and prepare qualified, committed applicants for Peace Corps training and service;

--share country, culture, and program information;

--build group rapport; and

--complete further medical and administrative processing.

The PRIST staff includes professional counselors, country representatives, former Peace Corps volunteers, and headquarters staff. The staff-to-trainee ratio is about 1 to 4.

Before the participants arrive, the staff holds a 2-day planning session. One of the main activities at this planning session is the development of the assessment criteria for that particular PRIST. This criteria is based on individual country needs and project specifics and therefore varies at each PRIST.

PRIST activities include staff presentations, group discussions, problem solving and various training activities that raise issues about working and living in foreign cultures. In addition, applicants are formally and individually interviewed by a counselor and by the country representative in small group sessions.

The final decision to invite an individual to pre-service training is made by the country representative with the other staff acting in an advisory capacity. Written assessments are prepared on observed behavior and performance according to standards established at the planning session. The standards established are not amplified by examples of acceptable behavior which demonstrate that the standards have been met; consequently, determinations that an individual does not meet the standards may be subjective. With the exception of one individual who was not selected for medical reasons, all others at the PRIST we attended were issued invitations.

The center for assessment and training

CAST focuses on mutual assessment and preliminary training. Particular emphasis is placed on staff assessment of an individual's suitability for Peace Corps service. The session takes place about 4 to 5 weeks before pre-service training overseas; cost is approximately $1,229 per person.

The assessment goals require that

--Peace Corps assess an individual's suitability and decide whether or not to issue an invitation to pre-service training and

--applicants assess Peace Corps and themselves, based on the CAST experience and on information obtained.

The training goals are to

--acquire skills to successfully and smoothly move from the United States into another culture;

--identify the role of the volunteer in development and to build skills to facilitate that role; and

--build support systems.

The CAST staff includes a professional training staff, country representatives, former Peace Corps volunteers, and various headquarters staff. The staff-to-trainee ratio is about 1 to 3.

A 3-day planning session takes place before the trainees arrive. In addition to determining the final agenda and discussing the roles and responsibilities of various staff members, staff training is conducted by the professional training staff to prepare those inexperienced members for their important responsibility as assessors.

Objective assessment is a primary CAST function and is accomplished through staff observation of trainee performance and behavior throughout the 8-day session. The staff rates the observed behavior, using standard generic criteria which addresses seven assessment dimensions. These assessment dimensions are further amplified with examples of acceptable behavior. The final decision to invite trainees is based on a staff consensus, using their individual ratings. A written consensus rating, covering each of the assessment dimensions, is prepared on each individual who attends CAST. Toward the end of CAST, the ratings are discussed with the individuals in private interviews. At that time, the individuals are informed about whether or not they have been invited to training.

The training that takes place during CAST is preparatory to in-country, pre-service training and deals primarily with emotional, personal development, and learning process issues. Individuals are encouraged to role play and discuss the topics being addressed both in small and large group settings. Of the 26 individuals who attended the CAST we visited, 8 were not selected; five were not selected by the Peace Corps and three were initiated by the individuals.

RATIONALE FOR THREE FORMATS

In response to our earlier report on the Peace Corps, officials agreed that all training candidates would undergo a 7- to 10-day U.S. orientation and screening, starting in fiscal year 1979. We found that this did not take place because of funding limitations.

Our analysis of representative 1980 staging processes showed that those not selected by the Peace Corps were 3 percent or less for PRIST and COMP and about 11 percent for CAST. Individuals who chose not to enter training after COMP and PRIST were just over 2 percent; for CAST, over 5 percent did not enter.

Although Peace Corps staging officials now wish to have all potential volunteers receive their training through the 8-day CAST, a limited budget has not allowed for total programing. PRIST and COMP have been retained because they are less costly even though they are less comprehensive.

First begun in 1970 to reduce early terminations, PRIST was discontinued for most countries in 1973 because an internal study determined it was not worth its cost. It was reinstated in December 1979. COMP, the oldest and least inclusive format, was initiated in the early 1960s and has been in existence since then. We were told that some Peace Corps country officials prefer COMP because it does not contain an assessment component. Trainee assessments take place only during in-country preservice training which is under their control rather than at a remote staging.

NO CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING AMONG THREE FORMATS

Peace Corps officials confirmed that no formal or written criteria exists within the staging office for assigning a potential group of trainees to one type of staging over another and, for the most part, that office is not involved in the process to determine which staging a group of individuals will attend.

The type of staging a potential volunteer will attend depends largely on what the country director requests. According to staging officials, before requesting a particular type of staging, country directors usually consider some or all of the following although there is no requirement that they do so:

--the date potential volunteers are needed in-country and the lead time required to organize a particular staging;

--the number of persons to attend a particular staging and the type of program;

--the decline or rise in the country's trainee and volunteer attrition rate;

--information about special country problems, such as political unrest and severely depressed economic conditions;

--the number of a particular type staging already held for the region and, more specifically, the country; and

--the availability of Washington staging staff, country representative(s), and outside personnel.

Granting these requests, of course, depends on funding availability.

FUTURE DIRECTION OF STAGINGS

No firm plans exist either to eliminate any of the three stagings or to establish one uniform approach. Although Peace Corps officials have stated that they intend to have all

potential trainees attend CAST, they have not established a timetable to implement their plan because of budgetary uncertainties and the higher cost of CAST. Peace Corps officials could not tell us when they thought COMP and PRIST would be eliminated.

An evaluation of CAST was started in spring 1980 to describe the CAST process, to make suggestions for its improvement, and to identify its impact on pre-service training and volunteer service as compared to alternate staging methods. Staging officials hope that if the results of this evaluation favor CAST, Peace Corps management will implement faster any plan to have all potential volunteers attend CAST.

The evaluation initially envisioned was to consist of five phases. According to Peace Corps evaluation officials, only two phases had been completed as of December 1, 1980. The remaining three phases are at a standstill because additional funds are needed and because an analysis of the first two phases is taking place to determine the feasibility of continuing the last three phases. Additionally, the remaining phases which touch on such areas as the relationship of CAST to pre-service training and the first year of service have caused some controversy with the field staff. The field is concerned that implementing the remaining phases will allow Peace Corps headquarters to assume control of staging decisions which the field currently makes. As far as the immediate future, during fiscal year 1981, Peace Corps staging officials estimate that based on 3,095 potential volunteers they will conduct 29 CASTs for 1,015 individuals, 60 COMPs for 1,800 individuals, and 8 PRISTs for 280 individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

Rather than finding, as we had expected, three staging formats in existence which, though different in format, pursued the same important objectives of assessment and preparation, we found three staging formats in existence which differed both in format and objectives. These differences ranged from the 3-day, $273 COMP with no assessment component to the 6-day, $833 PRIST with a strong self-assessment component and a subjective staff-assessment component to the 8-day, $1,229 CAST with a strong objective staff-assessment component.

The only rationale given for the existence of the three staging formats was that sufficient funds were not available to stage everyone under CAST and it was therefore necessary to utilize less thorough and less costly stagings. Although apparently committed to eventually having every prospective volunteer go through CAST, because of future budget uncertainties there is no timetable or estimate to accomplish this. In the meantime, no agencywide, formal criteria exists for determining or deciding which format a prospective group of volunteers will receive. The motivating forces for format selection are the preference of the country director and the availability of funds and staff.

We believe sound management practice dictates that every staging process should include an objective assessment by qualified staff to determine, when possible, the suitability and adaptability of prospective volunteers for the Peace Corps experience and to weed out those who are unsuitable. Objective staff assessments were not being done for over 52 percent of the individuals sent overseas in fiscal year 1980--those who did not attend a CAST--and the outlook is for this trend to continue.

In addition to giving important country and project information, we believe that a staging is an appropriate time to begin to impart the skills needed to successfully make a transition into different cultures. All three stagings provide for this, but significant variances in the extent of actual preparatory training produce some volunteers who are better prepared than others for the important transition to another culture and environment.

We did not fully assess CAST as compared to other formats or possible alternatives because sufficient internal data did not exist to make determinations on overall results. We believe that the internal CAST evaluation should be continued and that Peace Corps should determine the minimum, essential staging components. Additionally, the evaluation should include an examination of less costly alternatives which could adequately address the vital assessment and preparation objectives of stagings. The examination of alternatives could include data on those volunteers who have recently attended the different stagings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Director, Peace Corps, complete the agency evaluation and take action to

--ensure that each staging process contains both a component where an objective assessment by qualified staff is made of the suitability and adapability of prospective volunteers for Peace Corps service as well as a component that begins to impart the information needed to successfully make a transition to living and working effectively in a different culture; and

--establish a single, uniform staging format containing the important components mentioned above and of a cost that makes it feasible for all prospective volunteers to attend.

AGENCY COMMENTS

Peace Corps officials stated that, for Peace Corps to be effective in meeting both assessment and training goals, stagings should be pre-invitational events rather than pre-departure events. Officials also pointed out that such pre-invitational

events involve an inherent round-trip transportation cost which affects the feasibility of having such an event for everyone.

Of the three formats currently in use, only COMP is a pre-departure event. Although we believe that a pre-invitational staging would be better for objective assessment purposes, we also believe that possibilities for objective assessments exist in pre-departure stagings which are currently not being used or explored.

We have no disagreement with the Peace Corps on the need to continue the assessment and selection processes during pre-service training. In our opinion, early and continuing (during staging, through pre-service training, and beyond) objective assessments of individual suitability and adaptability for Peace Corps service is needed for all candidates. We believe the agency should continue to seek ways to assure that these assessments are provided.

CHAPTER 3

MANAGEMENT OF PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

Today, the responsibility for training Peace Corps volunteers rests largely with individual agency staffs in countries where Peace Corps programs are being carried out. The ability of country staffs to design, conduct, and manage this very important function on their own varies in each country, resulting in large fluctuations in the quality of training. Deficiencies and variances we encountered lead us to believe that, in the Peace Corps today, volunteers are not assured of (1) receiving the quality and degree of cross-cultural, language, and technical training they need to perform their assignments effectively and (2) deriving satisfaction from their tours of service. This results in some volunteers being less prepared for, and probably less effective in, their assigned jobs than others.

PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

In establishing the Peace Corps, the Congress assigned the agency the responsibility for making available to interested countries qualified men and women willing to

--help those countries meet their need for trained manpower,

--help non-Americans better understand the American people, and

--help Americans better understand other people.

The Peace Corps is well aware of the important role that the training of volunteers plays in fulfilling these responsibilities. The willingness of host countries to continue their relationships with the Peace Corps largely depends on how well prepared volunteers are for their assignments. Though the effectiveness of Peace Corps programs is recognized as being influenced by many factors, the agency has stated that its eventual effectiveness rests principally on the quality of its overseas volunteers.

The importance it places on training is demonstrated by the amount of appropriated funds Peace Corps earmarks for this function. In fiscal years 1980 and 1981, for example, a total of nearly $41.3 million was specifically designated for this purpose. This represents some 18 percent of the agency's total appropriation for these 2 fiscal years.

The objective of Peace Corps training is to provide volunteers with the necessary cross-cultural, job, and language skills needed to perform their assignments effectively overseas. The major effort on the part of the agency to provide volunteers with these skills takes place during a period known as pre-service

training. This is a period ranging from 2 to 4 months which precedes the time an individual actually starts working on a designated assignment. In fiscal year 1980, over 80 percent of the agency training funds was designated for pre-service training.

Where and in what way this pre-service training is provided has varied throughout the 20-year history of the Peace Corps. Initially, these activities were conducted primarily in the United States by universities and other contractors. This was followed by an era during which the training was predominantly done at training camps located in Puerto Rico or in simulated villages at various U.S. locations. These early efforts were designed and managed for the most part out of Peace Corps headquarters in Washington.

Since the early 1970s, major changes in approach have taken place concerning this training. These changes are characterized by a much stronger emphasis on training volunteers in the country or area in which they will be serving. Accompanying this, far more responsibility for the form and content of this training has gradually shifted to the individual Peace Corps staffs located in the country where the training would take place. This shifting of responsibility has resulted in a relatively decentralized system in which individual countries act, for the most part, autonomously, concerning pre-service training matters. At the headquarters level, the Office of Programming and Training Coordination (OPTC) and the training officer positions within each of the three regional directorates do not get involved with the form and content of individual country programs, as a rule, unless requested to do so by the country staff.

Today, there is no standard setting in which pre-service training is provided throughout the Peace Corps. Elements of some pre-service programs are conducted in the United States, others in third countries, and some in a combination of locales. Available resources, changing needs, and conditions play a part in the selection of training sites. However, most programs are conducted entirely in the country where a prospective volunteer has been assigned to serve.

Just as there is no standard setting for the pre-service training phase, there is also no set format by which this training is provided. For example, the length of the training varies from country to country but ordinarily ranges from 2 to 4 months. In some countries, training (or some elements of it) is conducted by Peace Corps staff and/or locally hired staff while in others it is conducted entirely by a contractor.

The following is a brief narrative of the pre-service training program in Zaire. It is not intended to be representative of all pre-service training programs throughout the Peace Corps, but does generally describe how a pre-service training program is carried out.

Training in Zaire

Nearly all pre-service training for potential Peace Corps volunteers who will be working in Zaire is conducted at the Peace Corps Training Center in the eastern Zairian city of Bukavu. The Center operates under a contract with the Institute Superieur Pedagogique (ISP), a teacher-training component of the National University of Zaire. The Center's director, assistant director, and administrative officer work for the Institute and are all Americans and former Peace Corps volunteers. The Training Center is a former Belgian school that was loaned to the Peace Corps by the Government of Zaire in 1973; Peace Corps does not pay rent or utilities for the facility. The Center is largely self-contained and includes sufficient classrooms, dormitories, kitchen and recreational facilities to provide an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning.

Pre-service training consists of French and Zairian language, technical and community-development training. The training program lasts about 13 weeks. During the first 5 weeks the trainees receive extensive French instruction and community-development training. The 6th week involves a field trip where the trainees live with Zairians. The last 6 weeks of training are devoted to Zairian language and technical training. In addition, the community-development activities continue during the last half of training. The Training Center uses Zairians as language/cross-cultural trainers. These trainers are almost all teaching professionals or full-time students. Technical training is provided by active Peace Corps volunteers who were successful trainees and who have done a good job as volunteers. The following represents a typical daily training schedule at the Center:

8:00-10:00 AM	Language class
10:00-10:30 AM	Break
10:30-12:00 Noon	Language class
12:00- 2:00 PM	Lunch
2:00- 3:15 PM	Language class
3:15- 3:30 PM	Break
3:30- 5:00 PM	Language class
5:00- 6:00 PM	Community development class
6:00- 7:30 PM	Dinner
7:30- 9:00 PM	Technical/community development class

At times during training, the afternoon sessions are used for community-development or technical training. This schedule is maintained Monday through Friday, except Wednesday afternoons which are set aside for free time. Language classes are held on Saturday mornings, and the trainees are free Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

QUALITY OF PRE-SERVICE TRAINING VARIES IN EACH COUNTRY

Through our fieldwork and the report done by A.L. Nellum, we found that the design, conduct, and management of pre-service training vary greatly in each country in terms of format, substance, and quality. We found that some key management elements including objective setting, design, staffing, implementation, and evaluation are handled very creatively and effectively by some countries whereas other countries only gave them minimal or perfunctory consideration. Sufficient examples of deficiencies were found in each element to suggest that the existing relatively autonomous, decentralized training system is not adequate because it does not assure that volunteers will receive the type and quality of pre-service training they will need to be as effective as possible in their assigned jobs and that they will derive satisfaction from their tours of service.

The following sections discuss what we found on the key elements of pre-service training. These sections contain some examples of questionable performance (indicated by dots) in the countries we visited. We also identify, where applicable, related observations in the A.L. Nellum report.

SPECIFIC GOALS OFTEN NOT SET

●In Zaire, we researched the training files for all training programs conducted since May 1979 as well as the program then in progress. Despite the fact that the contract with the training contractor recognizes the importance of goals and states that

> "clear, precise learning goals are needed to maintain a high degree of trainee motivation and to measure progress during training. These goals shall be known by the trainee at the start of training and shall be objective, job-related and written."

We found that specific goals were often not established for some programs. The Peace Corps staff in Zaire is responsible for formulating the goals and objectives of each training program and for communicating these to the Training Center staff in a description of work statement. Of the 13 training programs conducted during the 12-month period ended May 1980, only 6 had any description of work statements on file. In addition, no description of work had been prepared for the training program being conducted at the time of our visit. However, even when descriptions of work were prepared, they did not always contain clear, precise objectives. For example, in the description of work prepared for an agricultural/rural development program, there was an extensive list of required technical skills. However, only the following vague language training and cross-cultural training objectives appeared in the description of work. (See next page.)

--Introduce trainees to issues, frustrations as well as hopes and possibilities that exist at their future site, in their area, and for Zaire.

--Teach trainees to relate and communicate with Zairians in French and one local language.

°In the Philippines, we found that the program philosophy practiced there strongly emphasized that the volunteers themselves conduct community surveys to identify local needs and that the volunteers subsequently design programs to satisfy those needs. In other words, many times no one knew the actual or type of assignment individuals would be in even after training was completed. This program philosophy had a marked effect on the setting of training objectives because setting measurable goals beforehand was very difficult in some areas and precluded developing a clear definition of what characteristics or knowledge were considered necessary for well-prepared trainees.

THE DEGREE, QUALITY, AND AMOUNT OF TIME INVESTED IN PLANNING AND DESIGNING

●In many Peace Corps countries, we noted that the amount and types of resources being used in planning and designing pre-service training programs were quite limited. For example, the Nellum study found that there was little exchange of information between the countries it visited on pre-service training models, approaches, personnel, or materials. In both Guatemala and Paraguay, we found that the information exchanged about training programs between Peace Corps countries within that region was minimal and with countries outside that region, quite rare. In Zaire, other Peace Corps training programs were rarely used in the program design there. We also noted in Zaire that the views of the Zaire government were not sought regarding what they expected of volunteers or which skills they wanted taught in pre-service training.

●In the Philippines and Thailand, we found that the country was receiving little or no information on the trainees themselves (education, age, experience, etc.) prior to their arrival in-country to use in the training design. Additionally, in the Philippines the results from a recent staging were not conveyed to the country by Peace Corps/Washington before the trainees arrived in-country. This conveyance did not take place even though a 4-week period existed between the end of the staging and the start of in-country training.

●In Zaire and Togo, we learned that at times the respective governments of these countries did not inform Peace Corps in sufficient detail about the specific assignments or locations to which individuals would be assigned until a training program was well underway. As a result, some training programs were designed which were neither tailored nor suited to specific assignments. Some programs did not contain a necessary element, such as a specific local language.

●In Togo, we found that some contractors hired from the United States to design and conduct pre-service training programs were not being required to arrive in-country early enough to adequately design their programs. For example, despite the desire of the country director to have training directors working on training designs 1 month before a program begins, the contracts issued by Peace Corps headquarters for two of the training directors positions--for the programs being conducted at the time of our visit--called for arrivals only 2 and 11 days before the trainees' arrival. In Paraguay, the contract for pre-service training required the Peace Corps to submit descriptions of work to the contractor about 10 weeks before training so that the contractor could then actively convert this into a specific training plan. We found in some cases that these were being submitted only 4 weeks before training.

●According to the contract for pre-service training in Zaire, the contractor is required to submit a training plan for each training program responsive to the description of work prepared by the Peace Corps management. Before actual training begins, the contractor and the Peace Corps are supposed to come to an agreement on a final training plan. The training plan called for is to contain

--interim and terminal training objectives taken from the description of work and put into behavioral terms;

--a clear statement of what would constitute a qualified trainee ready for Peace Corps service;

--content of training and description of training activities;

--statement of methodologies to be used;

--staffing;

--logistical and training resources;

--a cross-cultural adaption plan;

--weekly training schedules; and

--a description of the assessment process through which the contractor will measure the trainee's progress toward the final objectives.

For the period between May 1979 and May 1980, only two written training plans were prepared for the 13 training programs conducted during that time. The two plans did not contain all the information called for above. Although a draft training plan had been prepared for the training program in progress at the time of our visit, it did not contain all the information the contract required. The Peace Corps Country Director for Zaire readily

admitted that weaknesses existed in the planning aspect of its training programs and stated that except for language training, decisions about training are generally made on a daily basis and not in response to a training plan.

●In Togo, we found that there were no guidelines on what must be included in a training plan, so each program staff prepared plans differently. As a result, the completeness of the design for training programs or particular segments was very general at times. For example, each program we looked at in Togo had adequate cross-cultural training objectives around which some strong cross-cultural components could have been developed. However, we found that no real plans existed for providing this cross-cultural training and that, instead, great reliance was simply being placed on the village-based training segments and the native language instructors to somehow impart the necessary cross-cultural experience. No specific curriculum existed for what cross-cultural training was to be integrated into the language classrooms, nor were specific language periods set aside for cross-cultural training. In addition, no schedule of necessary activities existed for any village-based training segments which would have ensured that trainees were exposed to relevant aspects of village living. The amount of contact and exposure trainees had to village life was largely determined by the trainees.

THE QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE INDIVIDUALS RESPONSIBLE FOR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

●In the countries visited for the Nellum study, it was generally found that staff qualifications typically emphasized Peace Corps background and/or technical/academic credentials rather than actual training skills or training experience. They concluded that with some notable exceptions, a limited number of experienced trainers were involved in the training programs there. We also found that many of the staff lacked training experience and/or qualifications in some of the countries we visited. In Zaire, the technical coordinators and instructors responsible for designing and conducting training segments were, for the most part, Peace Corps volunteers and inexperienced trainers. In Togo, where the technical coordinators are responsible for preparing training plans for their respective programs, we found that two technical coordinators were active Peace Corps volunteers who were selected, based on their qualifications as English teachers. Neither coordinator had any previous experience in developing training plans.

●Using active Peace Corps volunteers currently assigned to the respective countries in various training capacities was found to be quite prevalent. In Togo, most of the training staff was made up of current Peace Corps volunteers serving in Togo. In Zaire, there was extensive use made of current volunteers as instructors in technical areas. In the Philippines, there was also extensive use of volunteers as trainers. One volunteer in the Philippines was serving both as a training coordinator for a youth program as well as a project director for another group of trainees

attending a pre-service program in establishing fisheries. In the past, this same volunteer had been involved in various training programs in the following capacities: a motorcycle instructor in 1978; logistics preparation for a fisheries education program in 1978; co-technical coordinator for a fisheries program in 1979; and participant in the design and conduct of two in-service training programs in fisheries in 1978 and 1979. We found that some volunteers involved in pre-service training were away from their project sites for periods of about 13 to 14 weeks including time spent at conferences and staff training. The extensive use of volunteers as trainers appeared to us to be a questionable staffing practice because the individuals were for the most part neither qualified nor experienced trainers. Because of this inexperience or lack of qualifications, the regular staff and others spent considerably more time and effort in training these volunteers in elementary training techniques. Of equal importance, was the fact that some volunteers were kept away from their projects for extensive periods even though they had been brought into the country on the basis that there was a real need for them at these same projects.

●In Zaire, no training was provided to the inexperienced instructors on how to teach or how to design training programs before the training program began. Likewise, in Togo, although the country director expressed the opinion that all trainers there needed training, some technical trainers did not receive training. In addition, the Nellum study reported that there was insufficient emphasis given to staff training and development in the countries reviewed.

THE RESPONSIVENESS AND COST EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

●The Nellum study found that in all the countries it visited much effort was spent on developing instructional or learning objectives as part of a general criterion referenced approach. However, many times these objectives were simply a formality which were not really integrated into the actual implementation of training. We found some evidence of this in Togo, for example, where, although each program had cross-cultural training objectives, these were generally ignored during implementation. Instead, reliance was placed on language teachers and village-based training to meet and achieve these objectives.

●In both Togo and Zaire, we found some rather basic breakdowns in implementation. As a result, some programs did not respond to either the trainees' needs or the program objectives. In Togo, for example, we found that trainees who arrived in-country more proficient in French than required by the program objectives were receiving the same amount of training in French as those who were just beginning French. Similarly, in Zaire we found that the amount of French instruction provided there was not based on individual needs to attain a minimum essential proficiency. All trainees received French training regardless of (1) their proficiency on arrival or (2) the needs of their eventual job.

●We also noted quite a few gaps between a desired result and the means envisioned for getting there. For example, in Paraguay even though fairly specific technical and cross-cultural objectives existed, no provisions had been made to have trainees placed with a volunteer already working in a similar program. This type of experience could have been more meaningful to the trainees. In Guatemala, although 58 hours were set aside for cross-cultural aspects of training and even though trainees did reside in the homes of Guatemalan families during the entire training period, we noted that only 6 of the 58 formal hours of training involved actual presentations by native Guatemalans. It would seem that more involvement by native Guatemalans with this aspect could have made it more relevant and practical. In Zaire, we found that not all trainees were scheduled to have a live-in experience with a Zairian family although this aspect was considered by most people we spoke with to be a very significant cross-cultural experience in pre-service training. Finally, in Togo we found that very little local language training or assistance was being provided to trainees despite the existence of objectives in this area. For the most part, trainees were expected to learn local languages on their own once they reached their assignment sites. Only 6 hours a week of local language training was being provided and only after the demonstration of a very strong command of French. In addition, the local language materials provided consisted of only mimeographed sheets which included greetings, the numerical system, and a limited vocabulary list. No workbooks were available to the trainees. The ability of trainees to function at their sites using local languages or even to begin learning the local language would appear, therefore, to be severely hampered by the limited training given in this area.

●We found some situations where more expenses were being incurred than appeared necessary. In the Philippines, the number of training staff personnel compared to trainees was quite high and far exceeded what we observed in other countries. The following staff patterns were given to us as representative of the staff used for pre-service training in the Philippines.

Philippines Training Staff

10 trainees and less	10 to 20 trainees	20 to 30 trainees
1 Project Director/ Technical Coordinator	1 Project Director	1 Project Director
1 Administrative Secretary	1 Administrative Secretary	1 Administrative Assistant
1 Driver (maybe)	1 Driver	1 Secretary
1 Technical Coordinator	2 Technical Coordinators	1 Driver
1 Language/Cultural Coordinator	1 Language/Cultural Coordinator	3 Technical Coordinators
1 Ad Hoc Typist (4 weeks)	1 Ad Hoc Typist (4 weeks)	1 Language Coordinator
2 Language Instructors	4 Language instructors	1 Cultural Coordinator
6 Resource Persons	10 Resource Persons	1 Ad Hoc Typist (2 weeks)
		5 Language Instructors
		15 Resource Persons

As can be seen, these patterns resulted in a 1 to 1 ratio of staff to trainee in nearly all instances and went as high as two staff members to each trainee in some cases. Also in the Philippines, a project director was hired in the United States on a personal service contract at a cost of some $5,300 for a 9-1/2 week period. A personal service contract for this same period for a project director hired locally, as had been done in the past, was estimated to cost about $800. In Thailand, we found that a project director and a deputy director had been hired by means of personal service contracts for a pre-service training program ongoing at the time of our visit even though only a project director had been requested for this program. At the same time, another project director position they had sought to fill by means of a stateside personal service contract went unfilled. As a result, the position had to be filled by the training officer in Thailand, thereby taking him away from his other duties and responsibilities associated with overseeing all training programs.

●In both Paraguay and Guatemala, some relevant training opportunities provided by private and host-country government agencies were available often at no cost to the Peace Corps. For the most part, Peace Corps management was not taking advantage of these opportunities. We believe that incorporating these opportunities into pre-service training, if found to be feasible, could reduce training costs.

THE ROLE AND USE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

●According to the contract in effect in Zaire, the contractor is required to establish a system of monitoring the progress of trainees and for providing periodic feedback to the trainees on their progress. The importance of these feedback sessions was mentioned to us by the country director. He told us that because approximately 20 percent of trainees make inadequate progress during training, it is most important to let these individuals know when they are not making satisfactory progress. In this way, they have an opportunity to improve their performance and also to think about their Peace Corps commitment. The country director believed that feedback should be provided approximately every 2 weeks. In reviewing the training files of programs conducted during the past year, we found that such feedback normally occurred only once or twice during the 12-week training period. The trainees in the program when we visited had received feedback only once during the first 4 weeks of training. The country director considered the amount of feedback that was being provided inadequate and this was a definite weakness in the training program. The training director informed us of his intention to provide more feedback now that he had an assistant training director. Although in Togo we found that some form of feedback was being provided to trainees at least every 2 weeks, we did notice that there was no policy or established system for either the frequency or method of providing feedback.

●The contractor in Zaire is also required to submit biweekly progress reports to the country director, addressing progress toward the training objectives and other training activities. In this way, the country director who is not located at the training site can monitor the progress of training and can be kept aware of problems that develop during training. We found that, although the contractor was providing the biweekly reports for the current program, they were not provided regularly for training programs over the past year. As a result, the country director was not being kept adequately informed of the program's progress. Without such information, he could not institute changes when necessary to correct problems.

●In many countries, we found that meaningful, objective evaluations of pre-service training were either not being done or were only being partially done. In Togo, there was no objective measurement system to determine whether trainees had attained the necessary cross-cultural and technical skills; however, final reports addressing these items were required and were prepared on each trainee. We also found in Togo that required evaluation reports of the overall pre-service training program were merely summaries of events which took place during training; the reports did not address whether training objectives were met. In Thailand, very little effort was made to determine the effectiveness of technical training. The reasons given for not doing this were that (1) no technical objectives were included in the training design and (2) no criteria for measuring technical performance had been developed. In the Philippines, we found that, although a large amount of evaluation documentation was being generated, no basic systematic evaluation of training was taking place. The training officer there considered this to be an important element that was needed, but missing. In Zaire, although the contractor was required to provide a final report 2 weeks after each training program was completed, no reports had been completed for any training programs conducted during the year ended May 1980. Similarly, the training staff was supposed to establish a system for qualifying trainees which was objective and centered on the training objectives. No such system existed. The Nellum study noted that, for the most part, only rudimentary and informal attempts were being made to evaluate training. Several countries they visited expressed interest in or even had plans for conducting evaluations, but few systems or procedures were found to be actually in place for doing so.

●In some cases, we found that evaluation systems in effect did not seem to be serving the purpose for which they were established. In Guatemala, for example, we reviewed the evaluation reports done during pre-service training on all individuals who graduated from one particular training program, then left the Peace Corps shortly thereafter. In these evaluation reports, we found many indications that, apparently, these individuals had been performing well below average during training. However, despite this fact, they graduated from the program. Of 150 individuals who had gone through pre-service training there from September 1978 through April 1980, only 1 had not been recommended

for graduation after the completion of training. Similarly, although a Foreign Service Institute (FSI) 1/ score of 2 had been established as the goal for the language component of training in Guatemala we found that some 17 percent of the trainees who completed pre-service training there between September 1978 and April 1980 had not achieved this FSI score by that time, and yet were graduated. In Togo, the country director told us that it was necessary for trainees to reach an FSI level of 2 in French if they were to be effective in their programs. However, in reviewing records of past training programs, we noted that although a 2+ goal had been set for a program held there in 1979, two trainees tested at an FSI 1+ level and another at an FSI 2 level at the completion of training and became volunteers in Togo without further training.

●In Zaire, the individual responsible for preparing final evaluation reports had no experience and had received no training in conducting evaluations. He also had received no guidance on the format and limited guidance on the content of the required evaluation reports. This was much the same as in Togo where the individuals responsible for preparing evaluation reports also did not have evaluations experience. They had received no guidance on the format and little guidance on the content of evaluation reports. The Nellum study reported that in-country staffs had little knowledge of evaluation strategies and were largely unskilled in related technologies. They also concluded that there was a lack of perspective on the part of these staffs on the possible uses of such evaluations.

ONGOING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

The Peace Corps is aware that shortcomings exist in some aspects of its approach to pre-service training and it is trying in some cases to correct the underlying causes of these deficiencies. Two major efforts are the development of a core curriculum for pre-service training and the establishment of regional training resource offices (RTROs.) In conjunction with our fieldwork in Africa, we visited the pilot RTRO in Lome, Togo. Additionally, in Washington, we reviewed the development effort and current status of the core curriculum. The following sections reflect what we found regarding these two efforts.

Core curriculum

In concept, the Peace Corps is committed to the development and implementation of a basic Peace Corps volunteer training curriculum known as the core curriculum. This effort, which was initiated by OPTC members in conjunction with staff members

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1/FSI scores--a system developed by the State Department Foreign Service Institute for rating an individual's proficiency in a language on a scale of from 1 (elementary proficiency) to 5 (native proficiency.)

from the three Peace Corps regions, is intended to ensure that training is consistent and is providing the skills which volunteers will need to live and work effectively in the basic human needs program areas of the Third World. The effort envisions that the basic areas will be included in all training whether carried out contractually or in-house, in the United States or overseas.

In a memo to the senior staff of the Peace Corps, dated March 27, 1980, the Peace Corps Director gave his latest endorsement to the concept of a core curriculum:

> "We must thoughtfully design and implement a coherent training curriculum which strengthens both the sense of purpose and competencies of the volunteers and sustains them from the beginning of service to their return to the United States."

To date, the project has progressed to the stage where the basic goals have been identified and a limited number of training models have been drafted. During fiscal year 1980, OPTC developed and attempted to obtain agency agreement on the goals which the core curriculum is intended to address. Although subject to further revision, the following outline represents the most current statement of the core curriculum goals.

I. The Role of the Volunteer in Development

- A. Peace Corps and its role in development
- B. Community involvement
- C. Interaction skills
- D. Dynamics of poverty, self-determination and change
- E. Project management and problem solving
- F. The role of the volunteer after Peace Corps service

II. Cross-Cultural Training

- A. Transition processes
- B. Entry and fluency skills
- C. Political, social and religious context
- D. Preparation for minority volunteer

III. Language and Communication Training

- A. Communication in the culture
- B. Contextual communication
- C. Basic communications processes

IV. Volunteer Support: Health and Personal Well-Being

- A. Basic hygiene and wellness
- B. Personal support processes
- C. Basic counseling skills
- D. Human sexuality
- E. Drugs and alcoholism

V. Peace Corps Orientation

A. The three Peace Corps goals
B. General Peace Corps policies
C. Peace Corps country-specific policies

VI. Technical and Work Training

A. Role and job orientation
B. Site orientation
C. Technical skill training
D. Training in appropriate technology related to primary work assignment

At the time of our review, OPTC had developed plans for what it expected to accomplish in fiscal year 1981, regarding the core curriculum, and indicated to us in discussions that developing the core curriculum was the office priority project for the fiscal year. Developing and field testing training models for elements of the language and communications goals, the cultural goals, and the role of volunteers in development goals will have priority during this fiscal year 1982. OPTC estimates that it will be at least 2 years before an entire core curriculum will be fully developed and ready for field use.

Regional Training Resource Office

The RTRO for Africa was initially established in 1975 in Dakar, Senegal, when Peace Corps shifted most of its training from the United States to the more appropriate setting within the host country. RTRO was established to provide support for in-country training programs and to help ensure the quality of the newly dispersed training effort. This initial RTRO was closed in 1976 due to budget limitations within the Peace Corps but was reestablished in Senegal in 1978. In February 1980, the RTRO operations were moved to Lome, Togo. Currently, RTRO has a staff of seven. The Director and an Assistant Director for Administration are the only permanent Peace Corps staff members; the remaining positions are filled by contract employees. These positions include the training administrator, documentation specialist, logistics coordinator, office assistant, and secretary. When RTRO was relocated, it was planned that its staff would include as many as five area training officers--each located in different parts of the region--to serve a small group of countries. However, none of these five positions has ever been filled.

We found that the RTRO in Lome, Togo, was functioning as a consultant to the various Peace Corps staffs in Africa. It is currently exercising no responsibility concerning the design, implementation, or evaluation of specific country pre-service training programs. RTRO has begun to develop a documentation system and talent bank to retain information on training programs and trainers available for the region. However, the primary activity directly related to pre-service training is in conducting two

staff training workshops designed to improve pre-service training: the Training of Trainers workshop and the Language Coordinators workshop. Participation in these workshops on the part of countries is strictly voluntary.

The goal of the trainers workshop is to provide the training staff and volunteers who are going to be involved in pre-service training programs with necessary trainers skills. The workshop was developed because it was found that many times individuals, even though knowledgeable on a subject, lacked the skills needed to teach their knowledge and experience. In addition, it was found that many of these individuals had little exposure to or experience with adult learning theory. At the time of our visit, three trainers workshops, each lasting about 8 days, had taken place; 17 of the 23 countries in the African region participated. However, participation has varied significantly among the countries. Approximately 60 percent of the participants have been from only three countries; most countries have sent only one representative.

The 2-week language coordinators workshop presents techniques to improve language training. This workshop provides sessions in teaching methodologies and techniques, materials development, program coordination, and skills development through practice teaching. There had been two such workshops at the time of our visit; representatives from 18 of the 23 countries in the region participated.

CONCLUSIONS

A decentralized system for providing pre-service training has evolved within the Peace Corps and exists today. Under this system, in-country staffs have become, to a large degree, autonomous decisionmakers on most matters concerning the form and content of training programs. For the most part, they operate with very little guidance, direction, or input from Peace Corps headquarters on what should be provided in pre-service training and how it should be provided. As such, responsibility for how well the pre-service training function is being conducted and how well volunteers are being prepared rests largely on the individual agency staffs in countries where the Peace Corps is represented throughout the world.

We found that the ability of country staffs to design, conduct, and manage this very important function on their own varied significantly among countries. Some country staffs are not emphasizing the essential elements of objective setting, planning and design, staffing, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation.

The variance and deficiencies we noted were of sufficient magnitude and occurrence for us to conclude that a volunteer cannot be assured of receiving the quality and degree of cross-cultural, language, and technical training necessary to perform effectively in his eventual assignment. This results in some volunteers being less prepared for and probably less effective in their assigned

jobs than others. In light of the expressed importance of pre-service training in achieving the agency mission, we believe the Peace Corps should take steps to provide this assurance.

A core curriculum which sets forth both the elements and goals of pre-service training, as well as standards and guidance on what this training should provide to all potential volunteers, is needed to assure consistency and to provide a measure of quality control in training. The current effort at developing a core curriculum appears to be sound in concept but is taking an inordinate amount of time to develop and put into practice.

In addition to the core curriculum development effort, we believe a similar effort is needed on how to implement the core once it is developed. We have two concerns. First, the countries which have long been operating on their own may be reticent in accepting external attempts to put a core curriculum into practice and thereby render it meaningless. Secondly, countries will not have staff with sufficient training, skills, and experience to effectively implement the core curriculum. We believe that to eventually have a core curriculum successfully implemented, an effort must be started now which will address these important aspects.

Finally, we believe the RTRO concept is worthwhile and could help to improve pre-service training provided to potential volunteers. However, we also believe that their impact is being severely limited by (1) the nature of their operation, which is basically consultative and (2) the existence of unfilled important positions. We believe that RTROs should have the authority to provide mandatory courses aimed at upgrading the abilities of in-country training staffs and should serve as information clearinghouses on all aspects of training programs as well as for trainers available in the area. In addition, we believe these offices could also serve in an oversight capacity to evaluate and critique training taking place in the countries within the region so that certain training standards can be maintained throughout the Peace Corps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To provide for more consistency in the training function throughout the Peace Corps so that potential volunteers will be better assured of receiving the quality and degree of cross-cultural, language, and technical training necessary to peform effectively in their eventual assignments (regardless of the country of that assignment) and to assure that high standards are maintained, we recommend that the Director, Peace Corps,

--provide for more centralized direction and guidance of the pre-service training function, and

--accelerate the current development of the core curriculum and include direction and guidance on how the core curriculum should be implemented.

The form of this direction and guidance should include both the authority and capability to bring more cohesiveness and continuity to the training function. At a minimum, the following elements should be adequately addressed in each pre-service training program

--preparing a specific written statement on what skills, knowledge, and abilities are wanted as a result of the training--in measurable terms where feasible;

--preparing training plans by individuals with background and experience in training program planning and design;

--using experienced trainers for training or using others who have been well prepared as competent trainers;

--giving constant attention to whether the training plan is being carried out in the manner envisioned, whether it has proven to be responsive to the desired objectives, and whether the manner of implementation is the most cost-effective way of achieving the desired objective; and

--providing monitoring and evaluation instruments (1) to measure the progress and accomplishments of both individuals and the whole program and (2) to use in improving pre-service training.

AGENCY COMMENTS

In concurring with our recommendations for more centralized direction and management of the pre-service training function and accelerated development of the core curriculum, the Peace Corps staff pointed out some of the complexities and sensitivities associated with implementing such approaches in 60 countries with several hundred programs.

Although we share the agency's concern for these issues, we believe such actions are necessary in order for the agency to be able to effectively manage and control the significant resources devoted to training.

CHAPTER 4

MANAGEMENT OF ATTRITION

The problem of early terminations of Peace Corps volunteers has been of continuing concern to the Congress and the Peace Corps. Attrition rates, generally characterized as high by both Peace Corps officials and Members of Congress, are frequently discussed at hearings with the aim of trying to reduce their adverse effects on program costs and accomplishments. The recruitment, selection, transferral overseas, subsequent training, and support of Peace Corps volunteers are not accomplished without the expenditure of significant time and resources by Peace Corps. Accordingly, high retention rates and low attrition rates are strived for.

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services (O/SS), a 10-person office, collects and maintains attrition data on a continuing basis. However, little or no subsequent analysis and/or distribution of this data is routinely taking place within the Peace Corps.

We do not know what is considered a normal attrition rate for an organization such as the Peace Corps. We are convinced, however, that current rates (up to 36 percent) are costly and good management practice suggests that every reasonable effort be made to minimize them.

ATTRITION DATA

Individuals recruited into the Peace Corps who are serving either as trainees or sworn-in volunteers may resign at any time. However, the Peace Corps assumes that (1) individuals volunteered with an honest intention to stay for their entire training and 2-year terms of service and (2) individuals are expected to honor their commitments. Many do not. The two most recent sets of complete attrition statistics available show that about 36 percent of the individuals recruited, selected, and sent overseas to the countries of their assignment did not complete their training and 2-year terms of service. Of the 3,547 individuals who entered training during fiscal year 1976, 1,279 left the Peace Corps before completing their terms. Of the 4,258 individuals who entered training during fiscal year 1977, 1,525 left the Peace Corps before completing 2 years of service. Of those who entered training during fiscal year 1977, 8.5 percent left before completing training, another 20.1 percent left before completing their first year of service, and another 7.3 percent left before completing their second year of service.

When an individual decides to leave the Peace Corps, a member of the Peace Corps country staff where the individual is assigned prepares a termination report. This report includes (1) the circumstances surrounding the early termination, (2) indications of the individual's performance and behavior during training and on-the-job, and (3) the country staff's determination of the reason for the early termination. A statement prepared by the individual

which conveys his/her reason for leaving is also included in the report.

An individual leaving the Peace Corps early is also requested to complete an early termination questionnaire while still in-country. The questionnaire is intended to obtain not only the individual's reason for terminating but also his/her perceptions of their job, programing, training, staff support, host-country support, and the cultural aspects of Peace Corps service. We were informed that approximately 85 to 90 percent of those who end their service early comply with this request. The country staff then forwards the termination report, the completed early termination questionnaire, and other related correspondence to O/SS in Washington.

Upon receipt of this material, an appropriate O/SS staff member reviews the entire package. The case is then forwarded to the country desk officer for information purposes, without any requirement for additional input. Upon receipt from the desk officer, the O/SS staff reviews the case to determine an overall reason for termination. The overall termination reason which O/SS assigns to the case may or may not agree with the reason indicated either by the country staff or the individual. After this determination has been completed and recorded, the complete file then becomes a part of O/SS records.

Certain data contained in the file is extracted and recorded in reference books which O/SS maintains according to regional area. For example, regional log books are maintained which contain a master listing, by project, of all individuals assigned to each country. Information on those individuals who depart early is also contained in these logs. Another set of log books contains a sequential, monthly listing of the early terminations within each region and the reasons for the terminations which O/SS assigned. Information recorded in these logs includes the individual's name, whether trainee or volunteer, marital status, sex, age, country, and project assignment. The logs also contain the date and reason for termination of service for each individual who leaves before they complete their term of service.

NO ROUTINE ANALYSIS OR DISTRIBUTION OF DATA

The procedure described above is the extent of analysis and distribution that is normally taking place on the data which O/SS accumulates. No further analysis or distribution of the data is routinely taking place. In our opinion, if this information were properly analyzed and distributed, it could make a valuable contribution to those managers responsible for recruiting, selecting, programing, placing and training volunteers. We asked O/SS officials why no further routine analysis and distribution of this data was taking place. We were informed that because of the large amount of data being received and the fact that it was being maintained manually, they were limited to preparing reports only upon special request.

In the past, most of these requests have been informal and have been made by regional officials usually for specific country attrition related reports. The Office of Program Planning and Evaluations (O/PPE) has also occasionally requested information from the early termination questionnaire for inclusion in some of their reports or studies.

O/SS has undertaken only two major analyses on their own of the data that office routinely accumulates, and both were published as annual attrition reports. The more recent report, issued in June 1979, was based on all individuals who entered the Peace Corps as trainees in 1976, tracing their 2-year terms of service. As previously mentioned, this study showed an overall attrition rate of approximately 36 percent over this period. In addition to strictly statistical analyses, the report also contained an analysis of the reasons assigned by O/SS for these early terminations which showed that over 25 percent terminated for reasons relating to their job, such as being over-qualified for their assignments; being frustrated by the host-country bureaucracy; or having a poorly defined job. Another 34 percent terminated for personal reasons: conflict with other volunteers; a spouse who could not adjust to the environment; or not having a feeling of belonging. According to this analysis, reasons directly related to training accounted for only 2 percent of those who terminated. More recently, the Peace Corps reported that overall trainee attrition in fiscal year 1979 was 13 percent for all reasons--training-related or not.

The most recent attrition report on the individuals who entered as trainees in 1977, which was prepared and issued by O/PPE in March 1980, contained approximately the same attrition statistics as the previous study--36 percent--but did not contain analyses indicating the reasons for terminations. However, discussions with O/SS staff indicated that they believed the reasons contained in their previous report (and their incidence) were fairly representative of more recent terminations based on the data their office gathered each day and on occasional interviews they had with individuals who had terminated.

FUTURE ACTIONS AFFECTING O/SS

An O/SS official informed us that the last attrition report which O/PPE issued is the basis for a current effort by the Agency which could affect the operation of O/SS. In a June 30, 1980 memo, the Peace Corps Director requested the regional directors and office heads to review the attrition report and identify what they considered to be the more prevalent reasons for attrition. In conjunction with O/PPE, O/SS is currently analyzing and using the responses received as input into an initial report to the Peace Corps Director on the development of an agencywide strategy to address attrition.

O/SS officials also told us that efforts are being made to have the O/SS data base computerized. To date, these efforts have basically consisted of discussions between O/SS and the Offices of Management and Computer Services, concerning various approaches. At present, O/SS is in the process of identifying their computer needs. Once their needs have been determined and accommodated by the present Peace Corps computer system, O/SS has long-range plans to establish a more routine reporting procedure--specifically, an annual attrition report. We were unable to obtain an estimate of when this could be expected.

On a related matter, the O/SS Director also informed us that, on the suggestion of O/PPE, use of the early termination questionnaire has been discontinued. In trying to use the data in conjunction with a recent analysis, O/PPE found that it was not possible to validate the data and, therefore, recommended that use of the questionnaire be discontinued. According to O/SS officials, the major problem apparently was that the questionnaire contained too many variables. As a result, the termination report will be the primary data-gathering tool used by O/SS in the future until a more reliable device is developed. O/SS and O/PPE are currently collaborating on the development of a unified system for collecting data which is intended to eventually lead to a replacement for the early termination questionnaire.

CONCLUSIONS

O/SS routinely collects and maintains potentially useful attrition data. However, no subsequent analysis or distribution of this data is routinely taking place. We believe that a more efficient, concerted, and directed effort on unwanted attrition could be waged if the substantial data that is being compiled on attrition and related matters were analyzed and disseminated more routinely to appropriate Peace Corps managers. For example, an analysis of early terminations, by country and by project within a country, would identify those projects experiencing the greatest attrition and the reasons for that attrition. Managers could use this information to redesign similar types of projects in that country and could redirect the training of individuals to be assigned to those types of projects. If, for example, the analysis showed that there existed a lack of host-country cooperation which was at the heart of many of the reasons for early terminations, such cooperation could be secured before assigning individuals. Or, if it showed that many individuals were found to be terminating early because they felt inadequate in their jobs as a result of not obtaining the necessary technical preparation during training, an adjustment to the elements emphasized in future training programs would seem to be in order.

As another example, an analysis of the monthly terminations could identify countries experiencing recurring or increasing attrition and the reasons being attributed for these terminations. This information could be helpful to future recruitment and placement efforts for a country if it showed, for example, a high percentage of individuals terminating because they felt over or under

qualified for their assignments or an inability to adjust to specific circumstances or conditions present within the host-country culture. Acting on this information, recruiters could attempt, in the future, to place more emphasis on obtaining individuals whose skills or experience more accurately matched the true needs of the job. In addition, those individuals responsible for staging could assure that more emphasis was given to informing the recruited individuals during staging on the conditions and circumstances present in that country and attempt to more stringently assess whether or not they were capable of adapting to the situations they would be confronting in-country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

So that the Peace Corps might better address its attrition problem in a more concerted and knowledgeable way, thereby minimizing the expenditure of scarce resources and time on individuals who are less likely to complete their training and 2-year terms of service, we recommend that the Director, Peace Corps, establish a system to

--collect and systematically evaluate relevant attrition data, including the identification of major causes of early terminations;

--periodically distribute the evaluation results to appropriate managers; and

--make changes to minimize the adverse effects of attrition as found in the Peace Corps cycle of programing, recruitment, selection, training, and service.

AGENCY COMMENTS

In responding to our recommendation on analysis and distribution of the data which O/SS compiles, Peace Corps officials characterized this data as (1) inaccurate and unreliable and (2) a potential source of misinformation for management. Although our review was not aimed at testing the reliability or accuracy of the O/SS data, we of course agree with the Peace Corps that a very important step in conducting a meaningful study of attrition is the establishment of an accurate attrition data collection system. Once such a base is established, a system to analyze, distribute, and follow up on the results of this data should provide the appropriate managers with the information they need to more effectively address the causes of attrition.

Peace Corps

Washington, D.C. 20525

Office of the Director

March 5, 1981

MEMORANDUM

TO : J. K. Fasick, Director, GAO

FROM : William Sykes, Deputy Director, Peace Corps

SUBJECT : Response to Report Entitled "The Preparation of Volunteers for Peace Corps Service: Some Areas in Need of Attention"

Despite some specific problems that we have with the GAO report, we generally concur with the recommendations spelled out on page iii of the report's digest. The problems we see--that the study's methodology is rather sketchily presented, that there are some questionable assumptions about training, and that the evidence is sometimes inaccurate or insufficient to support the conclusions--will be addressed in an oral response in the meeting scheduled for March 6, between GAO project manager, Ed McLaughlin, and my representatives.

However, we do not wish these problems to detract from the sense we have that the conclusions are generally accurate and match our own perceptions of current problems with Volunteer preparation, and more importantly that the recommendations made are ones we endorse and in fact have been working towards. For the most part, the major retarding factor has been a lack of sufficient resources to move the Agency's training agenda along the paths we had planned. This GAO report corroborates the appropriateness of our plans--however, the lack of resources is still a problem, one which will probably be exacerbated as we deal with the budgetary constraints of the 80s.

The remainder of this memo contains some specific notes about each recommendation.

1. Ensure that every staging contains both a component where an objective assessment by qualified staff is made of the suitability and adaptability of prospective volunteers for Peace Corps service as well as a component that begins to impart the skills needed to successfully make a transition to living and working effectively in a different culture.

We concur with this recommendation. We do, however, wish to emphasize two things which experience has demonstrated to us. First, a "staging" as described in the recommendation must be a pre-invitational event (about four weeks before departure for training) to be effective in meeting both its assessment and training goals. Even though quality training could occur in a predeparture staging (an event which occurs just before the trainee departs for his/her training program), selection decisions would be impractical and almost impossible because people have quit their jobs, sold their

goods, cut their ties and have generally made a serious psychological commitment to Peace Corps. They come really prepared to start training, whereas in a pre-invitational event they come prepared for mutual decision-making. Unfortunately a pre-invitational event has a certain cost factor built in--round trip transportation--which affects the feasibility question in the next recommendation.

Secondly, we wish to note that even if all applicants passed through a pre-invitational event, it would still be necessary to emphasize and expect assessment and selection processes to continue during pre-service training. All problematic applicants will not be "weeded out" during a pre-invitational event. As pre-service training continues and as it gets more focused on a specific assignment in a particular part of the country, other factors may begin to crop up which were not assessable before and which may be grounds for deselection.

2. Establish a single, uniform staging format containing the important components mentioned above and of a cost that makes it feasible for all prospective volunteers to attend.

Given that the event must be pre-invitational, the feasibility question assumes paramount importance. We intend to explore ways to do something like the CAST less expensively. Even if the technical issues around training and assessment design indicate that we can cut some costs, it is clear that it would not save enough money to make it feasible for "all prospective volunteers to attend." That continues to be an agency goal, but the unclear resource picture at this time precludes commitment as to when (or if) it will be possible to attain this goal.

In the interim, we feel it is necessary to maintain the variety of stagings we presently have as a partial solution. They tend to meet some of the training needs (given limited resources) of the various countries and projects for which volunteers are recruited--even if they do not all meet the selection needs. Also, we will attempt to make the training goals and activities of the different events more standard.

3. Provide for more centralized direction and management of the pre-service training function.

We concur with this recommendation in principle. However, how to do this remains a very complex and sensitive problem. We must allow individual training programs sufficient leeway to adapt to specific programmatic needs and country variations while maintaining enough consistency in core goals and training methodology to assure a reasonable margin of quality control. And we must do this in close to 60 countries with several hundred pre-service training programs.

While we need to exercise more centralized quality control, we also need to provide the field with the resources and tools they need to carry out the Agency training agenda. Recent efforts to define core curriculum goals and materials, to refine and expand our training of trainer efforts, and to do in-service training of field/staff training managers are all aimed at improving the Agency's capacity to deliver training and provide more centralized direction. In addition, there are other options being considered:

(a) Regional Training Centers: These would be training centers where all volunteers going to a certain region or sub-regions would be trained. This would make it easier to insure a more standardized training experience for Volunteers. This option is probably most applicable for the LA Region.

(b) Increasing FSR/FSN Training Slots: One of the problems with training is the tremendous turnover in personal service contract training staff combined with inadequate permanent staff responsible for training. Increasing slots would help deal with this problem, and bring more stability to the Peace Corps training picture. Ultimately, the action which would have most impact would be to appoint more FSNs to training manager positions as they could be trained with the knowledge that their contract (unlike FSR) could be longer than 2½ years if their performance merited it.

(c) Longer Term Contracts for Pre-service Trainers: We could develop a pool of trainers under contract to Peace Corps for a year who would receive orientation at the beginning of the contract that would help them carry out our pre-service training goals. At present, ex-PCVs do most of the training (with the exception of the language staff). They usually are inexperienced as trainers, do one training program, and leave for home. Even if we do run them through a training of trainers workshop, the increased skills are only used in one program. Also, PSCs can generally only be given for three to six months, so we cannot offer more to most such trainers. By working through a training management contract, we could offer a one year stint with Peace Corps training wherein trainers would commit to orienting them properly, and providing appropriate inservice orientation refinements.

These options, of course, all imply certain resource commitments and contractual issues and it is unclear at the moment what we will be able to do. However, the problem is critical--how to provide more consistent and higher quality training to all Volunteers, with a less transient, more competent core of trainers. Our present efforts represent a "band-aide" approach which is hampered by the issues identified above.

We intend over the next three months to explore longer term options (such as those mentioned above) which would improve the whole training system. The options we are considering would provide more centralized direction of pre-service training. We should also add that we do not agree that the Regional Training Resource Center should play a role in exercising control over the quality of training as that would conflict with the very valuable consultative training role it is designed to carry out, given the decentralized training structure. Under more centralized structure, the RTRO concept would require rethinking. Thus, more centralized management would have to come through other mean.

4. Accelerate the current development effort on the core curriculum and also include a concurrent effort addressing how the core curriculum should be implemented.

We concur with this recommendation. The core curriculum development effort

represents one of the long range solutions to the problems confronting Peace Corps training. Development efforts are currently underway--design work has gone on and is going on with several modules, and plans are being made for pilot testing and refurbishment. We are already committing, then, a large portion of our available training resources to core curriculum development (please see attachment for current plans); unfortunately, these "available training resources" are limited, and that has caused progress to be somewhat slow. With adequate resources, the efforts to develop a core curriculum can be accelerated; a final decision on resources available for such an effort will be made as soon as Congress acts on our FY82 budget.

Implementation of the core curriculum relies on the kinds of long term training systems questions discussed under #3 above. Without concomitant long range improvements in our training delivery system, the development of a core curriculum will not have a substantial impact on Peace Corps training.

5. Ensure that the attrition data compiled by the Office of Special Services is systematically analyzed and distributed to the appropriate management elements.

We would concur with this recommendation if the data compiled by the Office of Special Services (OSS) were accurate and reliable. In fact, the data are not reliable, and would probably constitute a source of misinformation for management. Even the 36% attrition figure which is used in the report is questionable, as no distinction is made between manageable and unmanageable attrition* and very few conclusions could be drawn from the accompanying "reasons" for attrition.

Before we provide for systematic distribution of OSS attrition data, we need to engage in a comprehensive study of attrition and design a system that will identify and record more accurate causes of early termination. Once this is accomplished, we can then provide for a management system which would make appropriate use of the results.

Without additional resources, this systematic effort cannot be done by OSS alone--they are understaffed at the moment and their primary function (contrary to what the GAO report claimed) is not one of collecting attrition data. Rather, their primary function is to provide administrative and per-

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* If one looks closely at some of the causes of attrition, it soon becomes evident that some portion of attrition can be attributed to causes which can be managed, and some cannot. Manageable attrition may be caused by such things as improper recruiting, screening, placement and selection; or lack of preparation in training, job dissatisfaction through poor programming, lack of support through understaffing or staff who may lack proper skills in personnel support or management; or lack of problem solving mechanisms such as in-service training. Examples of unmanageable attrition causation are: personal factors such as illness, family emergency, change of heart in mid-service, changing in-country conditions such as diminishing sponsoring agency support (such as a rapid shift in in-country priorities or funding), and changing political conditions in-country may create continuous uncertainty and make some work completely impossible.

sonal support to early terminees, serve as a liaison between families and volunteers, and handle volunteer emergencies of all kinds. Collecting attrition data is only one part of their various functions.

Within the next three months, we will develop a plan for implementing a systematic study of attrition and attrition data collection. This is a critical project, as accurate attrition data could shed light on how effectively the different parts of the system are working--recruiting, placement, CAST, pre-service training, programming and program management. With accurate data collected over time, we would be able to systematically identify some of the causes of attrition and find those parts of the system that are working well. We might also be able to define an acceptable rate of what could be termed "good" attrition.

We hope you find this general response to the report's recommendations to be informative. We found the report to be very useful in crystallizing and bringing together several of the complex issues which will continue to need our efforts in order to improve the preparation of Peace Corps Volunteers. We will be focusing our efforts over the next three months, developing long range plans aimed at addressing these systematic problems that can be carried out within our resource limitation.